



### Unified Champion Schools

With sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program offers a combination of activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sport and classroom and community experiences that reduce bullying and exclusion, promote healthy activity and interactions, combat stereotypes and stigma, eliminate hurtful language in schools, and engage young people in pro-social activities that lead to more inclusive and accepting attitudes, behaviors and school climate

**1**

Evidence Based with the opportunity to provide the Arkansas Department of Education with Arkansas specific and reliable results.

**2**

Meets school climate and student engagement pieces for true student and school success

**3**

True partner willing to work together to achieve all of the States ESSA goals

**4**

Proven partner with the US Department of Education, receiving an unprecedented nine years of grant funding to do the work of Unified Champion Schools

**5**

A proven model of resources no matter the size of the district or school

**6**

Current results of our program nationwide show Unified Champion Schools has made a significant contribution to improving school climate, reducing incidents of bullying, and improving the overall educational experience of the students who participate.

**7**

Unified Champions Schools also brings a level of health and wellness to assist the school with their overall health goals by working with teachers, wellness committees, or school health staff. As the world's largest healthcare provider for people with intellectual disabilities we have the ability to partner with each school on including and tracking Special Education students in the health and wellness goals.

**8**

Emerging evidence that students who participate in Unified Champion Schools show improvements in academic performance (Lansing Michigan School District report)

## How we align

**Title 1 Resources:** UCS provides a unique way for schools to advocate for funding through the family engagement activities. This provision also addresses ensuring that families of students with disabilities are included in family engagement activities. Special Olympics Arkansas is eager to assist with joint agreement funds. Special Olympics Arkansas is prepared to provide assistance to schools looking at filling out these sub-grants.

**Title 2 Funds for Professional Development:** Our professional development covers many topics from anti-bullying to physical activity. We offer trainings for general education, special education, and athletics as well as administration.

**Title 4 Opportunities:** Unified Champion Schools can assist the state in reaching goals set under this provision such as; the well-rounded education (academic and social enrichment programming) and supporting safe and healthy students.

## Statistics:

What are the school characteristics?

# Students in UCS schools	AR	National
Less than 500	33%	25%
501-1000	27%	40%
1001-1500	13%	18%
1501-2000	0	9%
More than 2000	27%	8%



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

Who is involved in the planning and implementation of the Unified Schools Strategy?

Who is involved	AR	National
Special Education Teacher	69%	70%
Student w/o disability	54%	56%
School Administrator	46%	47%
General Ed Teacher	39%	46%
Students w/disabilities	39%	38%
SO Staff	39%	38%
P.E. Teacher	31%	34%
Parents	23%	28%
Adapted PE	8%	21%
Other community member	8%	23%



IMPACT	Did not make a difference	Made some difference	Made a big difference
Increasing opportunities for students to work together	7%	7%	80%
Increasing confidence of students with ID	7%	13%	80%
Creating a more socially inclusive school environment	7%	21%	72%
Reducing bullying, teasing, or the use of offensive language	7%	26%	67%
Increasing the opportunities for general education and special education teachers to work together	27%	40%	33%

*"This is the best movement I have seen to unite all athletes,"*  
Arkansas Unified School



*"I have enjoyed all of the opportunities that have been offered by Unified Schools. It has given both students with and without disabilities at our school an opportunity to help out in the community and become more involved. It is worth it when you see the difference it makes,"*  
Arkansas Unified School Liaison





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# What is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program?

Since its founding Special Olympics has been providing quality sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities across the globe. Today, **Special Olympics serves as a driving force for social inclusion**, with the vision to create a world where “people with intellectual disabilities of all abilities are welcomed in their communities and join with others to learn, work, compete and play with the same rights and opportunities as others.”

Integral to this work is a focus on youth. Special Olympics views youth as “powerful and effective advocates... open-minded to new things,” and as having “the courage of conviction to step up and defend their beliefs. For this reason, [Special Olympics] find(s) that young people are some of the most powerful and effective advocates on behalf of acceptance”.

Since 2008 Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a school-based strategy supported and endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with intellectual disabilities in schools and in their communities across the country.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting systems-wide change. With sports as the foundation, the three component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sports, classroom and school climates of acceptance. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel a part of, all activities, opportunities and functions.

*Youth and adults working together collaboratively in an inclusive setting create socially inclusive schools. Unified Champion Schools promote a school climate that:*

- is free from bullying and exclusion,
- combats stereotypes and negative attitudes,
- eliminates hurtful language,
- promotes healthy activity and interactions, and
- is welcoming and values the engagement of all students.

It is not intended for students to simply be recipients of programming, but rather be architects of lasting change and community building, where adults serve as allies to youth, rather than managers of youth. In fact, a central tenet of the Unified Champion Schools program is **inclusive, intergenerational leadership**, where shared goals and work are owned collectively by both youth and adults.

## Within Unified Champion Schools:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities for physical activity and for building positive peer relationships across the school setting - in hallways and lunchrooms, in classrooms and gymnasiums, and on athletic fields of play.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to personally learn and grow.

At its core, the Unified Schools strategy is not just about including students with disabilities, but unifying all students; moving from adult-led programming to student-led mobilization and action; and transitioning from sports as recreation to sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and change.



## Helpful Resources

More information on how schools can promote social inclusion can be found in **A Framework for Socially Inclusive Schools**, found at [www.specialolympics.org/hsplaybook-resources](http://www.specialolympics.org/hsplaybook-resources)



# How does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program support current education initiatives?

The activities of the Unified Champion Schools program enhance a number of key educational initiatives in important and relevant ways. The initiatives found below are frequently a part of school improvement plans and activities as school staff seek to increase student success. If you are already focusing on any of these initiatives, becoming a Unified Champion School will amplify and enhance your existing emphasis.

## Core Content and 21st Century Skills

The resources and activities provided through the Unified Champion Schools program allow **students to gain core content and 21st century skills across the curriculum.** Deep understandings and ability to use acquired skills happen when students are provided experiences which draw on prior knowledge and utilize higher order thinking skills as they apply their learning to strengthen the environment around them. Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, social and cross-cultural skills and leadership and responsibility are all 21st Century Skills that are reflected and reinforced through implementation of the Unified Champion Schools program.

## A Positive, Caring, Equitable School Climate

Context matters. There is growing research that demonstrates students perform better academically, socially and emotionally when they are meaningfully engaged, contributing members of a school with a **positive, caring, equitable school climate.** A school that expects, encourages and supports inclusive practices is a critical underpinning to the establishment of an equitable learning environment for all students. This has been shown to result in positive impacts on student performance, and is supported by the Unified Champion Schools program.

## Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Currently implemented in thousands of schools, **Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** are being used to better teach and reinforce expected behaviors throughout the school. The Unified Champion Schools program supports this work across all school settings by providing meaningful opportunities for students to work and learn together in ways that support all learners and create an equitable, caring environment for all. Culturally responsive educational strategies, differentiated instruction and positive behavioral supports are just a few of the bedrock practices employed in inclusive schools. Inclusive education should be a universal commitment and a core value to ensure equitable access and success for students and adults at all three tiers of a PBIS school-wide system.

## School Connectedness

School connectedness is an important factor in student success and well-being. Students who feel they belong and are valued contributors to the community are more likely to attend school, have higher grades and test scores, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and harmful activities such as bullying.<sup>7</sup> Practices that **promote school connectedness** are incorporated in the Unified Champion Schools program by providing opportunities for all students to engage in meaningful school-based activities.

## Physical Health and Emotional Well-being

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests that regular physical activity has a number of benefits to **overall physical health as well as the emotional well-being of adolescents** such as the reduction of anxiety and stress and improvements in self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> Unified Sports extends the opportunities for all students to be actively engaged in a variety of sports and physical activities which provide both physical and socio-emotional benefits.



## Helpful Resources

Seven characteristics of socially inclusive schools have been identified. A guide outlining federal, state, and district level policy considerations that support these characteristics can be found in “**A Policy Guide for Socially Inclusive Schools**” at [www.specialolympics.org/hsplaybook-resources](http://www.specialolympics.org/hsplaybook-resources)



# Why are Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools needed?

"...now that it's year after year, the freshman that are coming into it, they're seeing it, so it's becoming a part of the school's culture."

-Teacher

"It's not so much [students without disabilities are] escorting them to the cafeteria or they're escorting them to the gym. They're walking, chitchatting, talking, having a conversation with them like two friends would have."

-Administrator

"We're capable of doing anything, because we're special education coming together with students not in special education."

-Student with a disability

"I noticed that things have changed around the school, kids became more considerate, they watch what they said, and are accepting of kids with ID. They sit at their tables and talk to them."

- Student

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program promotes a socially inclusive school climate where acceptance, respect and human dignity for all students is the norm. As the data below demonstrate, a Unified Champion School equitably supports students with and without intellectual disabilities and fosters meaningful opportunities for every student to contribute.

Within Unified Champion Schools, students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with intellectual disabilities, are more tolerant, and realize the impact their words and actions have on others.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

Socially inclusive school and classroom climates are more evident where students with disabilities feel welcome, are routinely included in and feel they are a valued part of all activities, opportunities and functions.<sup>12</sup>

Extensive evaluation of the Unified Champion Schools program has revealed the following positive impacts:<sup>6,7,8</sup>

84%

84% of students generally regard the experiences they've had through **their experiences within a Unified Champion School as a positive turning point** in their lives.

87%

87% of students learn that **standing up** for something they believe is the right thing to do.

71%

71% of students with and without intellectual disabilities **remained in contact with students with disabilities who they met through their school's inclusive programming after graduation**, with the most sustainable relationships occurring between peers who served as leaders together.

Developing Pro-social skills

Students who are engaged in programming develop valuable **pro-social skills**. The majority of students report learning:

- about **helping others** (87%)
- about how their **emotions and attitudes** can affect others (85%)
- that **standing up for something they believe** is the right thing to do (85%)

82%

82% of students felt that they were **able to change their schools for the better**.



# Unified Champion School Components



## Inclusive Sports

A fully-inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as Interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE or Unified Intramurals. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach and include opportunities for competition.

## Whole-School Engagement

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as Spread the Word to End the Word (R-Word) Campaigns, Pep Rallies or "Fans in the Stands" for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns or student fundraising. Ideally students with and without disabilities are involved with planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult in the school.

## Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities work to lead awareness, Unified Sports, advocacy, inclusion and other Special Olympics activities throughout the school year. Examples include such things as Unified Clubs, inclusive student councils or similar types of inclusive student groups. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities and/or training for students with and without disabilities.





# Batesville High School

## Batesville, Arkansas

This was one of the first schools to implement the Unified Champion Schools program in Arkansas, and they have demonstrated how a comprehensive program can take hold within a short period of time. They began the program with a calendar full of whole school engagement and awareness activities. Besides the official "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign, the students and school leaders have implemented their own awareness campaigns throughout the year. The students also work to ensure that the physical environment in the school "speaks" social inclusion. Classes have made Unified banners that decorate the walls of the school and are used to increase spirit and support at pep rallies.



The Unified Club currently has 45 members, and they are always looking for new ways to make their school more socially inclusive. For example, the members of the club attended Camp Shriver in the summer where they came away with several ideas that have been incorporated into their school year activities.

Batesville High School students create their own social inclusion activities as well as participate in school-wide events. In the past, these have ranged from having a float in the Homecoming Parade to holding a school-wide pep rally to celebrate the successes of their USA Games athletes and students participating in state Unified Sports competitions. They participate in Unified Floor Hockey, Basketball and Softball along with several local sports competitions.

Realizing the importance of including everyone, they have chosen an interesting way to recruit members for the Unified Sports teams. They are appealing to the athlete within everyone; not every student can make a varsity sports

team, but the Unified Sports team is open to all students.

They have engaged several players not previously aware of Special Olympics but became interested in Unified Sports because they wanted to play sports for their school. "Playing Unified" has opened more opportunities at this school for students both with and without intellectual disabilities.

The students also have implemented fundraising efforts such as the Polar Plunge to support the social inclusion work at their school, and members of Partners Club have volunteered at traditional Special Olympics Arkansas events in their area.

It is clear that students at Batesville High School are leaders in social inclusion.







Special Olympics Arkansas offers training upon request to educators of both general education and special education. The trainings typically appeal to administrators, general education, physical educators, health, school nurse, and special education. We are able to adapt the time to meet your specific requests. Some but not all of the topics we have are below.

### **K-5: FUNctional Fitness: Developing Thinking Skills through Intentional Movement**

Engage your classroom in a unique intentional approach to fundamental sport development while meeting your structured physical activity needs. SO YAP will provide Materials for k-2 sport development and advanced play 3rd-6th. Participants will gain new perspectives, effective best practices and exciting ideas for the upcoming school year.

Training will include interactive pieces of our Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program that aligns with the following important education initiatives:

- Service-learning
- Anti-bullying
- Character Education
- Health & Wellness; Anti-Obesity
- Changing School Climate
- Inclusive Collaboration
- Student Engagement & Dropout Prevention
- Universal Design

### **6-12: Not the same old Physical Education course; Refresh and Re-engage students with these new ideas on how create team environment within P.E**

Re-engage students with this new take on a traditional physical education class. You will be able to introduce new sports and meet your structured vigorous physical activity needs. This training session offers several resources from 6-12 in sport and health. Participants will gain new perspectives, effective best practices and exciting ideas for the upcoming school year.

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## **Improving School Climate, Student Engagement and Family Engagement through Unified Champion Schools.**

Covering all age groups, this session can be provided in 1, 3 or 6 hour blocks and is a great opportunity for the entire school staff to learn and work together. This training provides resources to the school in an effort to help meet strategic educational goals set forth by the district or state.

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- Service-learning
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Improving school climate and student engagement with sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program offers a combination of activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sport, classroom and community experiences that reduce bullying and exclusion, promote healthy activity and interactions, combat stereotypes and stigma, eliminate hurtful language in schools, and engage young people in pro-social activities that lead to more inclusive and accepting attitudes, behaviors and school climate.

### **To Schedule:**

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**Special Olympics Arkansas**

**Director of Marketing and Corporate Relations**

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## Lakeside School District

Administrative Offices  
2837 Malvern Road  
Hot Springs, Arkansas 71901-8319  
501-262-1880 Fax 501-262-2732

March 10, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I am pleased to write this letter of support for Special Olympics UNIFIED Champion Schools. Currently, I am a Special Services Administrator for the Lakeside School District. Lakeside High School became a Special Olympics UNIFIED Champion School in 2014. This program has touched the lives of many children and adults in our area since that time. They have grown socially and physically through the past three years. Our students have developed meaningful friendships as well. Our Special Olympics UNIFIED teams and Partner's Club have played a huge role in student success.

This program has made an extra-curricular activity more successful for our students. During the 2014-15, 2016-17 School Years, Lakeside High School has won the State Championship in Special Olympics UNIFIED Basketball. Our school district has rallied around our team. A pep rally was held at the high school prior to each State Championship Game and with the win, our team received State Championship Rings.

What a blessing this program has been for our district and community. I would recommend being a Special Olympic UNIFIED Champion School to any district. If you have any further questions or concerns about this program, please contact me at (501) 802-1915. Thanks for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Courtney Eubanks  
Special Services Administrator  
Lakeside School District



## BRYANT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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March 13, 2017

Dear ESSA Steering Committee:

Special Olympics Arkansas has partnered with Bryant Public Schools on the first district wide roll out of the Unified Champions Schools initiative. This program is a driving force for social inclusion while also focusing on improving health and wellness among all students regardless of ability. The activities of Unified Champion Schools enhance our current strategic plan and lead to student and school success.

Bryant saw positive change in our schools because of this program on all levels; elementary, middle school, and high school. The partnership we have with Special Olympics Arkansas has served as a solution for many of our goals such as; improved health, student engagement, family engagement, and overall school climate. It is important to note that implementation and execution of this program has not been cumbersome to teachers or administration.

Our experience was extremely positive. We were met with little resistance from teachers through the implementation process. I also need to mention the Arkansas specific data Special Olympics can provide measures of success of our non-academic indicators with little effort. I can strongly support this program as one option for the Every Student Succeeds Act's non-academic indicator aimed at improving school climate and student engagement.

I would be happy to speak to you about my personal experience with Unified Champion Schools and the affect it has had within Bryant Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Tom W. Kimbrell, Ed.D  
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Tom W. Kimbrell, Superintendent

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[www.bryant schools.org](http://www.bryant schools.org)



**St. Francis Area Developmental Center**  
**P.O. Box 1857 448 North Rosser Forrest City, Arkansas 72336**  
**870-494-4651 sfadc@ipa.net**

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Jennifer Grantham  
Special Olympics Arkansas  
2115 Main St.  
North Little Rock, Arkansas 72114

March 8, 2017

Jennifer:

Please accept this letter as my support for the Unified Champions Schools initiative promoted by Special Olympics Arkansas. I have been an active volunteer for Special Olympics since 1985. I am keenly aware of the wonderful opportunities afforded our Special Olympians through our traditional and unified sports. The very core of all of us is affected in a profoundly positive manner through our athletes.

The Forrest City School District is a Unified Champion School where I serve on the school board. I have seen firsthand through the eyes of a volunteer and students the positive impact unified sports has on our Special Olympic athletes and the traditional students who play unified sports. At both the senior high and the junior high traditional students seek out our school Special Olympics coaches asking to participate.

I appreciate what Special Olympics does for our athletes statewide and I am honored to offer my support of the Unified Champions Schools initiative.

Sincerely,

Joey Astin

**St. Francis Area Developmental Center, a private non-profit organization serving persons with  
developmental disabilities since 1974.**



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Dr. Tom W. Kimbrell, Superintendent